chapter 8

Functions of Language
Speech as Action

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we maintain our focus on language use and we look at the idea that part of the meaning of an utterance is its intended social function. It seems clear that learning to communicate in a language involves more than acquiring the pronunciation and grammar. We need to learn how to ask questions, make suggestions, greet, and thank other speakers. In other words we need to learn the uses to which utterances are conventionally put in the new language community and how these uses are signaled, if we are to use the language in a realistic way. Similarly, as hearers, part of understanding the meaning of an utterance is knowing whether we have been asked a question, invited to do something, and so on. In a terminology introduced by J. L. Austin which we discuss in section 8.2, such functions of language are called *speech acts*.

In the last chapter we discussed areas of meaning which highlight the role of context and speaker–hearer interpretation. We recognized that if we admit a distinction between semantics and pragmatics, some of these topics, for example conversational implicature, seem to fall under pragmatics, while others, like reference and deixis, seem to straddle the semantics–pragmatics divide. The study of speech acts

occupies a similar border area. In many cases the intended function is linguistically coded: languages often have, for example, specific morphemes, intonation and sentence patterns to mark questions, wishes, orders, and so on. However, as we shall see, communicating functions also relies on both general knowledge of social conventions and specific knowledge of the local context of utterance. This area, then, reveals the pattern we saw in the last chapter: hearers have to coordinate linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge to interpret a speaker's intended meaning.

We can begin our discussion by identifying two important characteristics of speech acts: **interactivity** and **context dependence**. The first is a crucial feature: communicating functions involves the speaker in a coordinated activity with other language users. For some uses of language this interactivity is more explicit than others. We can take as an example Akindele's description of a typical afternoon greeting between persons of equal age and status in the Nigerian language Yoruba (1990: 4):[1]

8.1   Greetings: Gloss:
        F: Ẹ káàsán.   F: Good afternoon.
        MT: Ẹ káàsán.   MT: Good afternoon.
        F: S'álàáfià ni?   F: How are you?
        MT: A dúpẹ́.   MT: We thank (God).
        F: Ilé ńkọ́?   F: How is your house(hold)?
        MT: Wọ́n wà.   MT: They are (in good health).
        F: Ọmọ nkọ́?   F: How are your children?
        MT: Wọ́n wà.   MT: They are (in good health).
        F: Bá mi kí wọn.   F: Help me to greet them.
        MT: Wọ́n á gbọ́.   MT: They will hear.

A similar, if less extended, interactivity is characteristic of one of Austin's well-known examples: bets in English. As Austin described, a bet only comes into existence when two or more parties interact. If I say to someone *I bet you five pounds he doesn't get elected*, a bet is not performed unless my addressee makes some response like *Okay* or *You're on*. While other speech acts like asking a question or greeting someone do not need explicit responses to make them questions or greetings, they nonetheless set up the expectation for an interactive response. Studies in the discourse analysis approach known as **conversational analysis** (for example, Schegloff 1972, 1979, Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Goodwin 1979, Atkinson and Heritage 1984), have revealed that failure to respond to a question, say by silence, triggers certain types of compensatory behavior: the speaker may repeat the question, seek to evade the perceived rejection, or others may try to repair the lapse.[2] Similarly, Akindele (1990: 3) says of Yoruba greetings like 8.1 above:

8.2   Another factor is the Yoruba ethical code in which it is a duty to greet people engaged in different activities. Hence there is a salutation for every conceivable occasion and situation … Greeting persons at work is regarded as a matter of respect in one's occupation. Failure to offer such greetings in the appropriate context usually gives rise to bad feelings especially among close friends and relatives to the extent that it can lead to suspicion of sorcery or witchcraft.

The second feature, context dependence, has two aspects. The first is that many speech acts rely on social conventions to support them. Sometimes this is very explicit, where the speech act is supported by what Searle (1969) called **institutional facts**. Thus every society has procedures and ceremonies where some participants' words carry a special function. Examples commonly used in the literature include a judge saying *I sentence you to hang by the neck until dead*, a priest in the marriage ceremony saying *I now pronounce you man and wife*, a country's president announcing *I declare a state of national emergency*, and so on. These speech acts of sentencing prisoners, pronouncing a couple married, and so on can only be performed by the relevant people in the right situations, where both are sanctioned by social laws and conventions. Again, though these are just the most explicit cases, it is clear that social conventions also govern ordinary uses of language in society. Sociolinguistic and ethnographical studies have shown us how the forms of asking questions, making greetings, and so on are influenced by a particular society's conventions for the participants' age, gender, relative social status, degree of intimacy, and so on.[3]

The second aspect of context dependence is the local context of a speech act. An utterance may signal one speech act in one situation and another elsewhere. Questions in English are notoriously flexible in this way. If the asker already knows the answer then an utterance with the form of a question can be, for example, a request, as if I see you are wearing a watch and I say *Can you tell me the time?* Or the question might have the force of a statement *No* as in B's possible replies in the invented exchange in 8.3 below:

8.3   A: Are you going to buy his car?
       B: a.   Are you crazy?
             b.   Do you think I'm crazy?

We can find a parallel use of questions with known answers in the popular use of sentences like *Is the Pope a Catholic?*, *Do dogs have fleas?* or *Do bears shit in the woods?* as livelier and more informal ways of saying *Yes of course*.[4]

Because of this flexibility, we have to be careful about terminology. Some sentences have a particular grammatical form which is conventionally associated with a certain speech act. Thus questions in English, which of course include several types, usually have a special rising intonation pattern and an inverted subject-verb word order which differentiates them from statements, as 8.4b and c below are distinguished from 8.4a:

8.4   a.   He is leaving.
       b.   Is he leaving?
       c.   When is he leaving?

When there is a conventional match between grammatical form and speech act function we can identify a **sentence type**. We need to use separate terms for sentence types and speech acts though, so that we can identify cases where the matching does not hold. Thus we might identify the sentence types in 8.5 below:

8.5   a.   declarative, e.g. *Siobhán will paint the anaglypta*.
       b.   interrogative, e.g. *Will Siobhán paint the anaglypta?*
       c.   imperative, e.g. *Siobhán, paint the anaglypta!*
       d.   optative, e.g. *If only Siobhán would paint the anaglypta!*

The conventional, or literal, use of these sentence types will be to perform the speech acts with the corresponding letter in 8.6 below:

8.6   a.   assertions
        b.   questions
        c.   orders
        d.   wishes

However, as we have already seen, interrogatives can be used for other speech acts than asking questions, and the same is true to a greater or lesser degree of the other sentence types. We discuss this variability in section 8.4.

    Both of the features we have outlined, interactivity and context dependence, emphasize that in discussing speech acts we are examining the union of linguistic and social behavior. We will begin our discussion of this behavior by reviewing J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts in section 8.2, then go on to examine revisions of the theory by J. R. Searle and others in 8.3. Thereafter in section 8.4 we look at an interesting and difficult area for the theory: variability and indirect speech acts. Finally, in section 8.5 we come back to the identification of sentence types.

8.2   Austin's Speech Act Theory

8.2.1   Introduction

Speech act theory was developed by the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin whose 1955 lectures at Harvard University were published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words* (1975). The approach has been greatly developed since so that there is a large literature. One of the most important writers on speech acts has been the philosopher John R. Searle (for example: 1969, 1975, 1976, 1999) and the theory has been of interest to many philosophers, for example Strawson (1964), Recanati (1987), Vanderveken (1990), Alston (2000), and Green (2013). Within linguistics, studies have included Sadock (1974, 1994), Cole and Morgan (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979), Gazdar (1981), Sadock and Zwicky (1985), Wierzbicka (1985, 1987), Croft (1994), Zaefferer (2001), Allan (2006), and Jucker and Taavitsainen (2008). We look at Austin's proposals in this section and discuss subsequent developments in section 8.3.

    Austin's work is in many respects a reaction to some traditional and influential attitudes to language. We can risk simplifying these as a starting point. The attitudes can be said to involve three related assumptions, as follows:

8.7   a.   that the basic sentence type in language is declarative (i.e. a statement
               or assertion);
        b.   that the principal use of language is to describe states of affairs (by
               using statements);
        c.   that the meaning of utterances can be described in terms of their truth
               or falsity.

Some of these assumptions are discernible in recent formal approaches to semantics, as we shall see in chapter 10. Among Austin's contemporaries these assumptions are associated with the philosophers known as **logical positivists**, a term originally applied to the mathematicians and philosophers of the Vienna Circle; see Ayer (1959) for discussion. An important issue for logical positivist approaches is how far the meaning of a sentence is reducible to its verifiability, that is, the extent to which, and the means by which, it can be shown to be true or false.

Austin's opposition to these views is the "common-sense" one that language is used for far more than making statements and that for the most part utterances cannot be said to be either true or false. He makes two important observations. The first is that not all sentences are statements and that much of conversation is made up of questions, exclamations, commands, and expressions of wishes like the examples in 8.8 below:

8.8 a. Excuse me!
   b. Are you serving?
   c. Hello.
   d. Six pints of stout and a packet of peanuts, please!
   e. Give me the dry roasted ones.
   f. How much? Are you serious?
   g. *O tempora! O mores!*

Such sentences are not descriptions and cannot be said to be true or false.

Austin's second observation was that even in sentences with the grammatical form of declaratives, not all are used to make statements. Austin identified a subset of declaratives that are not used to make true or false statements, such as the examples in 8.9 below:

8.9 a. I promise to take a taxi home.
   b. I bet you five pounds that he gets breathalyzed.
   c. I declare this meeting open.
   d. I warn you that legal action will ensue.
   e. I name this ship *The Flying Dutchman*.

Austin claimed of these sentences that they were in themselves a kind of action: thus by uttering 8.9a a speaker makes a promise rather than just describing one. This kind of utterance he called **performative** utterances: in these examples they perform the action named by the first verb in the sentence, and we can insert the adverb *hereby* to stress this function, for example *I hereby request that you leave my property*. We can contrast performative and non-performative verbs by these two features. A speaker would not for example expect the uttering of 8.10a below to constitute the action of cooking a cake, or 8.11a the action of starting a car. These sentences describe actions independent of the linguistic act. Accordingly the use of *hereby* with these sentences as in 8.10b and 8.11b sounds odd.

8.10 a. I cook this cake.
    b. ?I hereby cook this cake.

8.11 a. I start this car.
    b. ?I hereby start this car.

8.2.2   Evaluating performative utterances

Austin argued that it is not useful to ask whether performative utterances like those in
8.9 are true or not, rather we should ask whether they work or not: do they constitute
a successful warning, bet, ship naming and so on? In Austin's terminology a perfor-
mative that works is called **felicitous** and one that does not is **infelicitous**. For them
to work, such performatives have to satisfy the social conventions that we mentioned
in section 8.1: for a very obvious example, I cannot rename a ship by walking up to
it in dock and saying *I name this ship the Flying Dutchman*. Less explicitly, there are
social conventions governing the giving of orders to co-workers, greeting strangers,
and so on. Austin's name for the enabling conditions for a performative is **felicity
conditions**.

Examining these social conventions that support performatives, it is clear that
there is a gradient between performatives that are highly institutionalized, or even
ceremonial, requiring sophisticated and very overt support, like the example of a
judge pronouncing sentence, through to less formal acts like warning, thanking, and
so on.[5] To describe the role of felicity conditions, Austin (1975: 25–38) wrote a very
general schema:

8.12   A1   There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a
              certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of
              certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances…
        A2   The particular persons and circumstances must be appropriate for
              the invocation of the particular procedure invoked…
        B1   The procedure must be executed by all the participants correctly…
        B2   … and completely.…

Austin went on to add **sincerity** clauses: firstly that participants must have the req-
uisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified by the procedure, and secondly,
that if subsequent conduct is called for, the participants must so conduct them-
selves. If the speech act is unsuccessful by failing the A or B conditions in 8.12, then
he described it as a **misfire**. Thus my casually renaming any ship visiting Dublin
docks is a misfire because A2 above is not adhered to. If the act is insincerely per-
formed, then he described it as an **abuse** of a speech act, as for example saying *I
bet…* with no intention to pay, or *I promise…* when I already intend to break the
promise. Linguists, as opposed to philosophers, have tended not to be so interested
in this second type of infelicity, since the primary speech act has, in these cases, been
successfully communicated.

8.2.3   Explicit and implicit performatives

Looking at examples of performative utterances like those in 8.9 earlier, we can say
that they are characterized by special features, as in 8.13:

8.13   a.   They tend to begin with a first person verb in a form we could
              describe as simple present: *I bet*, *I warn*, etc.
        b.   This verb belongs to a special class describing verbal activities, for
              example: *promise, warn, sentence, name, bet, pronounce*.
        c.   Generally their performative nature can be emphasized by inserting
              the adverb *hereby*, as described earlier, thus *I hereby sentence you to…*

Utterances with these characteristics we can call **explicit** performatives. The importance of speech act theory lies in the way that Austin and others managed to extend their analysis from these explicit performatives to other utterances. The first step was to point out that in some cases the same speech act seems to be performed but with a relaxation of some of the special characteristics mentioned in 8.13 above. We regularly meet utterances like those in 8.14 below, where this is so:

8.14   a.   You are (hereby) charged with treason.
        b.   Passengers are requested to avoid jumping out of the aircraft.
        c.   Five pounds says he doesn't make the semifinal.
        d.   Come up and see me sometime.

We can easily provide the sentences in 8.14 above with corresponding explicit performatives, as below:

8.15   a.   I (hereby) charge you with treason.
        b.   We request that passengers avoid jumping out of the aircraft.
        c.   I bet you five pounds that he doesn't make the semifinal.
        d.   I invite you to come up and see me sometime.

It seems reasonable to say that the sentences in 8.14 could be uttered to perform the same speech acts as those in 8.15. In fact it seems that none of the special characteristics of performative utterances is indispensable to their performance. How then do we recognize these other performatives, which we can call **implicit** performatives? Answers to this have varied somewhat in the development of the theory but Austin's original contention was that it was an utterance's ability to be expanded to an explicit performative that identified it as a performative utterance. Austin discussed at length the various linguistic means by which more implicit performatives could be marked, including the mood of the verb, auxiliary verbs, intonation, and so on. We shall not follow the detail of his discussion here; see Austin (1975: 53–93). Of course we soon end up with a situation where the majority of performatives are implicit, needing expansion to make explicit their force. One positive advantage of this translation strategy is that it focuses attention on the task of classifying the performative verbs of a language, a task we shall take up in section 8.3. For now, the basic claim is clear: explicit performatives are seen as merely a specialized subset of performatives whose nature as speech acts is more unambiguous than most.

8.2.4   Statements as performatives

Austin's original position was that performatives, which are speech acts subject to felicity conditions, are to be contrasted with declarative sentences, which are potentially true or false descriptions of situations. The latter were termed **constatives**. However, as his analysis developed, he collapsed the distinction and viewed the making of statements as just another type of speech act, which he called simply **stating**. Again, we needn't follow his line of argument closely here: see Austin (1975: 133–47) and the discussion in Schiffrin (1994: 50–54). In simple terms, Austin argued that there is no theoretically sound way to distinguish between performatives and

constatives. For example, the notion of felicity applies to statements too: statements which are odd because of presupposition failure, like the sentence *The king of France is bald* discussed in chapter 4, are infelicitous because the speaker has violated the conventions for referring to individuals (i.e. that the listener can identify them). This infelicity suspends our judgment of the truth or falsity of the sentence: as we saw in chapter 4, it is difficult to say that *The king of France is bald* is false in the same way as *The president of France is a woman*, even though they are both not true at the time of writing this.

So we arrive at a view that all utterances constitute speech acts of one kind or another. For some the type of act is explicitly marked by their containing a verb labeling the act, *warn*, *bet*, *name*, *suggest*, *protest*, and so on; others are more implicitly signaled. Some speech acts are so universal and fundamental that their grammaticalization is the profound one of the distinction into sentence types we mentioned in section 8.1. In their cross-linguistic survey of speech acts Sadock and Zwicky (1985: 160) observe:

8.16   It is in some respects a surprising fact that most languages are similar in presenting three basic sentence types with similar functions and often strikingly similar forms. These are the declarative, interrogative, and imperative. As a first approximation, these three types can be described as follows: The declarative is used for making announcements, stating conclusions, making claims, relating stories, and so on. The interrogative elicits a verbal response from the addressee. It is used principally to gain information. The imperative indicates the speaker's desire to influence future events. It is of service in making requests, giving orders, making suggestions, and the like.

Though the authors go on to discuss the many detailed differences between the uses of these main forms in individual languages, it seems that sentence type is a basic marker of primary performative types.

This conclusion that all utterances have a speech act force has led to a widespread view that there are two basic parts to meaning: the conventional meaning of the sentence (often described as a proposition) and the speaker's intended speech act. Thus we can view our earlier examples in 8.5, repeated in 8.17 below, as divisible into propositional meaning (represented in small capitals in 8.18 below) and a sentence type marker, uniting to form a speech act as shown in 8.18 below:

8.17   a.   *Siobhán is painting the anaglypta.*
        b.   *Is Siobhán painting the anaglypta?*
        c.   *Siobhán, paint the anaglypta!*
        d.   *If only Siobhán would paint the anaglypta!*

8.18   a.   SIOBHÁN PAINT THE ANAGLYPTA + declarative = statement
        b.   SIOBHÁN PAINT THE ANAGLYPTA + interrogative = question
        c.   SIOBHÁN PAINT THE ANAGLYPTA + imperative = order
        d.   SIOBHÁN PAINT THE ANAGLYPTA + optative = wish

We have to remember though that the matching in 8.18 is only a typical one; we return to this question in section 8.4.

8.2.5   Three facets of a speech act

Austin proposed that communicating a speech act consists of three elements: the speaker says something, the speaker signals an associated speech act, and the speech act causes an effect on her listeners or the participants. The first element he called the **locutionary act**, by which he meant the act of saying something that makes sense in a language, that is, follows the rules of pronunciation and grammar. The second, the action intended by the speaker, he termed the **illocutionary act**. This is what Austin and his successors have mainly been concerned with: the uses to which language can be put in society. In fact the term **speech acts** is often used with just this meaning of illocutionary acts. The third element, called the **per-locutionary act**, is concerned with what follows an utterance: the effect or "take-up" of an illocutionary act. Austin gave the example of sentences like *Shoot her!* In appropriate circumstances this can have the illocutionary force of ordering, urging or advising the addressee to shoot her, but the perlocutionary force of persuading, forcing, frightening, and so on the addressee into shooting her. Perlocutionary effects are less conventionally tied to linguistic forms and so have been of less interest to linguists. We know for example that people can recognize orders without obeying them.

8.3   Categorizing Speech Acts

After Austin's original explorations of speech act theory there have been a number of works which attempt to systematize the approach. One important focus has been to categorize the types of speech act possible in languages.[6] J. R. Searle for example, while allowing that there is a myriad of language-particular speech acts, proposed that all acts fall into five main types, as in 8.19 below (1976: 10–16):

8.19   1   REPRESENTATIVES, which commit the speaker to the truth of the
              expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding);
        2   DIRECTIVES, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee
              to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning);
        3   COMMISSIVES, which commit the speaker to some future course of
              action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering);
        4   EXPRESSIVES, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases:
              thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating);
        5   DECLARATIONS, which effect immediate changes in the institutional
              state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extralinguistic
              institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war,
              christening, marrying, firing from employment).

Searle uses a mix of criteria to establish these different types, including: the act's **illocutionary point**; its "**fit**" with the world; the **psychological state** of the speaker; and the **content** of the act. The illocutionary point is the purpose or aim of the act: thus the point of directives is to get the hearer to do something. The "fit" concerns direction of the relationship between language and the world: thus speakers using representatives, for example assertions, are seeking to get their words to match

the world, while users of directives, for example requests or orders, are seeking to change the world so that it matches their words. The criterion of *psychological state* relates to the speaker's state of mind: thus statements like *It's raining* reflect belief, while expressives like apologies and congratulations reveal the speaker's attitude to events. Finally, *content* relates to restrictions placed on speech acts by what they are about, their propositional content.[7] Thus one cannot properly promise or predict things that have already happened. Or for another example: one way of viewing the difference between a promise and a threat is in terms of whether the future event is beneficial or harmful to the addressee.

   In distinguishing these acts, Searle further developed Austin's notion of felicity conditions into a classification of conditions that must hold for a successful speech act. Searle (1969) distinguishes between **preparatory**, **propositional**, **sincerity,** and **essential** conditions for an act. These are necessary contextual conditions that license and distinguish different speech acts. See for example 8.20 below where we give examples of his conditions for the act of *promising*:

8.20   Conditions for promising (Searle 1969: 62ff)
         [where S = speaker, H = hearer, A = the future action, P = the
         proposition expressed in the speech act, e = the linguistic expression]
         a.   Preparatory 1: H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A and S
              believes H would prefer S's doing A to not doing A.
         b.   Preparatory 2: It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in
              the normal course of events.
         c.   Propositional: In expressing that P, S predicates a future act A of S.
         d.   Sincerity: S intends to do A.
         e.   Essential: The utterance e counts as an undertaking to do A.

Among these conditions we might note that the second preparatory condition suggests that one does not normally promise what would happen as a matter of course. Thus saying *I'll be home at five* to one's spouse when leaving for work might not be considered a typical promise. The propositional condition, as we mentioned earlier, reflects that in a promise a future act must be predicated of the speaker, so that something that has already happened cannot be promised.

   The conditions for questions include those in 8.21 below:

8.21   Conditions for questioning (Searle 1969: 66)
         [where S = speaker, H = hearer, P = the proposition expressed in the
         speech act]
         a.   Preparatory 1: S does not know the answer, i.e. for a yes/ no
              question, does not know whether P is true or false; for an elicitative
              or WH-question, does not know the missing information.[8]
         b.   Preparatory 2: It is not obvious to both S and H that H will provide
              the information at that time without being asked.
         c.   Propositional: Any proposition or propositional function.
         d.   Sincerity: S wants this information.
         e.   Essential: The act counts as an attempt to elicit this information
              from H.

It is clear that this characterization relates to a prototypical question: it does not apply of course to rhetorical questions, nor the questions of a teacher in the classroom, a lawyer in court, and so on. Note that the propositional condition simply says that there are no semantic restrictions on the content of a question as a speech act. Searle provides felicity conditions like those in 8.20 and 8.21 for each type of speech act: we shall be satisfied for now with looking at just these two.

Elsewhere in the literature, there have been a number of taxonomies of speech act types suggested, for example Schiffer (1972), Fraser (1975), Hancher (1979), Bach and Harnish (1979), Wierzbicka (1987), Vanderveken (1990), Zaefferer (2001).[9] One assumption that seems to underlie all such classification systems, and one we have assumed so far in talking about speech acts, is that there is some linguistic marking (no doubt supported by contextual information) of a correlation between form and function. In other words we recognize a sentence type and are able to match it to a speech act. There are two problems with this: the first is how to cope with cases where what seems to be the conventional association between a sentence form and an illocutionary force is overridden. We discuss this in the next section under the heading of **indirect speech acts**. The second problem, which we discuss in section 8.5, arises from difficulties in identifying sentence types.

8.4   Indirect Speech Acts

8.4.1   Introduction

In 8.2.4 we discussed the typical matching between certain sentence types and speech acts. Thus we discussed the matching between the interrogative sentence type in English and the act of questioning. However, as we noted there, quite often this conventional matching is superseded by an extra, more immediate interpretation. The conventionally expected function is known as the **direct speech act** and the extra actual function is termed the **indirect speech act**. Thus we can find examples like those in 8.22 below:

8.22	**Utterance**	**Direct act**	**Indirect act**
	Would you mind passing me the ashtray?	question	request
	Why don't you finish your drink and leave?	question	request
	I must ask you to leave my house.	statement	order/request
	Have a nice day!	order	good wish
	Leave me and I'll jump in the river.	order and statement	threat

The problem is: how do people recognize the indirect act? There are a number of possible answers to this. We look first at Searle's (1975) approach.

The first question is whether hearers are only conscious of the indirect act, or whether they have both available and choose the indirect act as most contextually apt. Searle (1975) argues that speakers do indeed have access to both: he terms the direct use the **literal** use of the speech act and the indirect, the **nonliteral** use. He

gives as examples the sentences in 8.23a–8.25a below, all of which can be requests, but none of which have the form of imperatives in the (b) versions, but instead are interrogatives and declaratives:

8.23   a.   Can you pass the salt?
        b.   Please pass the salt.

8.24   a.   I wish you wouldn't do that.
        b.   Please don't do that.

8.25   a.   Aren't you going to eat your cereal?
        b.   Please eat your cereal.

Searle argues that in the a cases above two speech acts are available to the hearer: the literal act is backgrounded or secondary while the nonliteral act is primary – "when one of these sentences is uttered with the primary illocutionary point of a directive, the literal illocutionary act is also performed" (1975: 70). The question he raises is: how is it that these but not all nonliteral acts will work, that is, why is it that stating *Salt is made of sodium chloride* will not work as a request like *Can you pass the salt?* (p. 75). Searle's solution relies on the system of felicity conditions mentioned in the last section. The conditions for making requests include the following:

8.26   Conditions for requesting (Searle 1975: 71)
        [where S = speaker, H = hearer, A = the future action]
        a.   Preparatory condition: H is able to perform A.
        b.   Sincerity condition: S wants H to do A.
        c.   Propositional condition: S predicates a future act A of H.
        d.   Essential condition: Counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A.

Searle argues that other sentence types can only work as indirect requests when they address one of the conditions for requests. Thus sentence 8.23a *Can you pass the salt?* addresses the preparatory condition in 8.26. This example shows that an indirect request can be made by asking whether (or stating that) a preparatory condition holds.

The sentence *I wish you wouldn't do that*, in 8.24a above, forms an indirect request by addressing another felicity condition: it states that the sincerity condition in 8.26 holds.[10]

Searle's third example, *Aren't you going to eat your cereal*, in 8.25a, works by asking whether the propositional content condition holds. Perhaps we can add another example: if a teacher uses an imperative as a directive to a student: *Return that book to the library!*, the propositional content involves predicating the future act: *You will return that book to the library*. Searle's point is that a corresponding indirect directive can be made by questioning this, that is *Aren't you going to return that book to the library?* or *Are you going to return that book to the library?*

So in this view, indirect speech acts work because they are systematically related to the structure of the associated direct act: they are tied to one or another of the act's felicity conditions. This still leaves the question of how the hearer works out which of the two acts, the backgrounded direct act or the primary indirect act, is meant. We look briefly at Searle's proposal for this in 8.4.2.

8.4.2 Understanding indirect speech acts

Searle's view of how we understand indirect speech acts is that we combine our knowledge of three elements to support a chain of inference. The elements are: the felicity conditions of direct speech acts, the context of the utterance, and principles of conversational cooperation, such as the Gricean maxims of relevance, quality, and so on that we discussed in chapter 7. We can briefly sketch how these three types of knowledge are used in this chain of reasoning by looking at the example of *Can you pass the salt?* (following Searle 1975: 73–75). In an everyday situation, the context will tell the hearer that the speaker should already know that he can pass the salt, and thus he recognizes that the question violates the felicity conditions for a question. The assumption of cooperative principles however leads the hearer to search for some other point for the utterance. This is essentially the search for an indirect speech act, that is the hearer asks himself, as it were, if it can't be a genuine question, what is the purpose of this utterance? The hearer knows that a condition for requests is that the hearer can actually carry out the desired act *A* (see 8.26a above), and also recognizes that to say *yes* here is to confirm that a preparatory condition for doing *A* has been met. The hearer also knows as part of general background knowledge that passing salt around a table is a usual part of meals, so this is a reasonable goal for the speaker to entertain. From these pieces of knowledge the hearer infers that the speaker's utterance is likely to be a request.

One problem with this account is that it does not take into account the **idiomatic** quality of many indirect acts. As Searle, and others, have noted, it is not at all clear that a parallel question *Are you able to pass me the salt?* would be interpreted in the same way, even though *can* and *be able* are largely synonymous. This difference is confirmed by the different possibilities of occurrence with *please*, usually an optional marker of requests. Thus *Can you please pass me the salt?* sounds fine while *Are you able to please pass me the salt?* sounds decidedly odd.

Searle's response to this seems to be that while the account of inference we have just outlined stands, there is a certain degree of conventionality about forms like *Can you … ?* being used as requests. Other writers strike the balance differently: Gordon and Lakoff (1975), for example, see hearers as employing shortcuts known as **conversational postulates**. These are rules that are engaged whenever the hearer is encouraged by conversational principles to search for an indirect speech act, as described above. The postulates reduce the amount of inference involved in tracing the indirect act. The relevant postulate for our present example would be as in 8.27:

8.27   Conversational postulate (Gordon and Lakoff 1975: 86)
         ASK (*a*, *b*, CAN (*b*, *Q*)) → REQUEST (*a*, *b*, *Q*)

In their formalism, 8.27 is to be interpreted as "when a speaker *a* asks whether *b* can do *Q*, this implies a request for *b* to do *Q*." Thus these postulates can be seen as a reflection of the conventionality of some indirect acts. More generally Gordon and Lakoff agree with Searle's suggestion that stating or questioning a felicity condition of a direct act will produce an indirect version. Thus, to add to our earlier examples, if we look at the conditions for requests in 8.26 earlier, we can predict that

instead of using the sentence *Please come home!*, the following indirect strategies are possible:

8.28   a.   Question the preparatory condition: *Can you please come home?*
        b.   State the sincerity condition: *I want you to please come home.*
        c.   Question the propositional content condition: *Will you please come home?*

Clearly both of these accounts, by Searle and by Gordon and Lakoff, view the understanding of indirect acts as involving inference. The question remains of balance: how much of the task is inferential and how much is conventionalized into strategies or rules for forming indirect acts. A position at the opposite extreme from Searle's would be that indirect speech acts are in fact idioms and involve no inferences from a direct to an indirect act.[11] In this view an utterance like *Can you pass me the salt?* is simply recognized and interpreted as a request, with no question perceived. This position is undercut by the common-sense fact that hearers deciding to be uncooperative, or trying to be funny, can choose to address utterances like *Can you tell me the time?* as direct questions, and simply say *Yes*. There is also some psychological evidence that hearers have access to the direct act in indirect requests: Clark and Lucy (1975), for example, is a psycholinguistic study which concludes from testing subjects' responses to sentences like *Please color the circle blue*, *Why not color the circle blue?*, *I'll be very happy if you color the circle blue*, and so on that direct speech acts are understood more quickly and that hearers seem to have access to the literal meaning of indirect acts. Experiments by Clark and Schunk (1980) seem to confirm this: they suggest that the literal meaning of an indirect request is an important element in the perceived politeness of the act. Thus among indirect requests, *May I ask you what time it is?* is more polite than *Won't you tell me what time it is?* because the first sentence's literal meaning places the onus on speaker action, while the second places it on hearer action. Also, in answering *May I ask you what time it is?* the response *Yes, it's six* is more polite than just *It's six* because the former addresses both the direct and indirect speech acts, answering the question and complying with the request.

   This last point raises an interesting issue: why do speakers employ these indirect acts? One motivation might be politeness, a hypothesis we examine in 8.4.3.

8.4.3   Indirect acts and politeness

Most commentators on indirect speech acts have remarked on the role of politeness. Searle (1975: 64), for example, writes:

8.29   In the field of indirect illocutionary acts, the area of directives is the most useful to study because ordinary conversational requirements of politeness normally make it awkward to issue flat imperative statements (e.g., *Leave the room*) or explicit performatives (e.g., *I order you to leave the room*), and we therefore seek to find indirect means to our illocutionary ends (e.g., *I wonder if you would mind leaving the room*). In directives, politeness is the chief motivation for indirectness.

Similarly, Ervin-Tripp's (1976) study of the social implications of indirect requests and orders in American English concludes that speakers do calculate issues of social power and politeness in framing speech acts. She suggests that indirect interrogative requests are useful because they give "listeners an out by explicitly stating some condition which would make compliance impossible" (p. 38), as in the following example of an indirect request and response (Ervin-Tripp 1976: 38):

8.30   [Daughter to father]
         You ready?
         Not yet.

This is even more pronounced with negative questions used indirectly as requests, for example (Ervin-Tripp 1976: 38):

8.31   [Motorist to gas station attendant]
         You don't happen to have any change for the phone do you?

Her study shows that the use of imperatives and *need* statements as directives is commoner from superiors to subordinates, for example (1976: 29):

8.32   [Doctor to nurse in hospital]
         I'll need a 19 gauge needle, IV tubing, and a preptic swab.

while questions with modals like *can*, *could*, *may*, and so on as requests are commoner with superiors and non-familiars, for example (1976: 38):

8.33   [Salesman to clerk]
         May I have change for a dollar?

8.34   [Employee to older employer]
         May I have the salt?

Ervin-Tripp points out that, as we all know, getting the calculation right is important in maintaining social relationships: she gives the example 8.35 below (1976: 63), where the more polite form a is felt to be less appropriate than b:

8.35   [Young file clerks who have worked together for four months]
         I got the applications done finally.
         a.   Could you take these back to Emma, please?
              or
         b.   Take these with you.

As Ervin-Tripp remarks, "To address a familiar peer as a non-peer is to be cold and distancing" (p. 63).
    The role of politeness in social interaction and conversation has been an important topic in sociology and conversational studies: we cannot hope to review this large literature here but a few remarks might shed useful light on the issue of indirect speech acts. We can begin by noting that work of the sociologist Ervin Goffman (1967, 1971, 1981)[12] on the social construction of the self, and his notion of **face**

(roughly, the public image an individual seeks to project) has influenced a number of linguistic studies which have dealt with politeness, including Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), Leech (1983) and Tannen (1984, 1986).

In Brown and Levinson's version, face is "the public self image that every member of society wants to claim for himself" (1978: 66). For them, face has two components: **positive face**, which represents an individual's desire to seem worthy and deserving of approval, and **negative face**, which represents an individual's desire to be autonomous, unimpeded by others. A kind of mutual self-interest requires that conversational participants maintain both their own face and their interactor's face. In this view, many verbal interactions are potential threats to face. Threats to negative face, which potentially damage an individual's autonomy, include orders, requests, suggestions and advice. Threats to positive face, which potentially lower an individual's self and social esteem, include expressions of disapproval, disagreements, accusations, and interruptions. Speakers can threaten their own face by their words: such self-threats to positive face include apologies and confessions.

In the continual interactive balancing of one's own and others' faces, politeness serves to diminish potential threats. In other words, speakers seek to weaken face-threatening acts by using a series of strategies, which together can be called politeness or tact. One of these strategies is the use of indirect speech acts.[13] These indirect acts can be seen to follow the distinction between positive and negative face. Negative indirectness helps to diminish the threat of orders and requests: examples would include giving an explanation for a request rather than the request itself, for example saying *It's very hot in here* instead of *Please open the window*; or as we saw earlier, querying a preparatory condition for the request, as in *Could you open the window?* Positive indirectness weakens the threat provided by disagreements, interruptions, and so on: for example, by prefacing them with apologies or explanation as in *I'm sorry but you're wrong* instead of simply *You're wrong*, or *I have to say that I don't agree* instead of *I don't agree*.

While the notion of politeness does seem to have explanatory value for the study of indirect speech acts, one important issue which it raises is cross-cultural variation. Researchers have applied the notion of politeness to a number of different languages and some have argued that the account of politeness strategies we have outlined, including the use of indirect speech acts, is too firmly based on European and North American, and particularly Anglophone, cultural norms. The notion of face, according to Brown and Levinson, is universal: every language community will have a system of politeness but the details of the system will vary because face is related to "the most fundamental cultural ideas about the nature of the social persona, honour and virtue, shame and redemption, and thus to religious concepts" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 13). Thus politeness strategies, and individual speech acts, will vary from culture to culture. This has been investigated by a number of studies containing implicit or explicit comparison with English, including Blum-Kulka (1983, 1987) on Hebrew, Wierzbicka (1985, 2003) on Polish, Matsumoto (1988, 1989), Fukishima (2003) and Haugh (2007) on Japanese, Hwang (1990) on Korean, Gu (1990) on Chinese, Sifianou (1992) on Greek, and Reiter (2000) and Felix-Brasdefer (2008) on Spanish. These studies give us insights into the politeness systems of their languages but the overall conclusion about a universal system is unclear: some have successfully applied a general system to the specific languages, while others like Matsumoto (1988) and Gu (1990)

have claimed that Brown and Levinson's system does not adequately reflect conversational practices in the highly deferential societies they describe. Leech (2007) proposes a framework to overcome such cross-cultural differences in politeness strategies.

It seems safe though to conclude that both speech acts in general (thanks, apologies, compliments, invitations, etc.) and indirectness will vary from culture to culture. In terms of our current interest in indirect speech acts, comparisons have been made between requests in English and German (House and Kasper 1981) and English and Russian (Thomas 1983) which seem to suggest consistent differences, with a greater use of indirectness in English than the other two languages. However, Sifianou's (1992) study of requests in Greek and English reveals the complexity and difficulty of such comparisons. Her conclusion is that the Greek politeness system is more oriented toward positive face strategies and the (British) English to negative face, leading to different expectations of what conversational politeness is. Later research (e.g. Watts 2003, Terkourafi 2005) concentrated on the role of context rather than the form of utterances. Terkourafi's (2002) research on Cypriot Greek requests focuses on the actions of participants in matching between formulaic language and situational context to derive illocutionary force.

8.5   Sentence Types

Our final section takes us back to an issue we raised in chapter 5: how to decide whether a given grammatical category, say subjunctive, is a marker of a sentence type, or some semantic category like mood.[14] We have defined a sentence type as a conventional matching between a grammatical form and a speech act. Thus some languages have a question word which contrasts with a declarative word, as in the Somali examples 8.36a and b below, where there is also a contrast with a lack of such a word (or zero marking) for the imperative as in 8.36c:

8.36   a.   Warkii   miyaad   dhegeysatay?
             war+kii   ma+aad   dhegeysatay
             news+the   Q+you   listen.to-2sg-PAST
             "Did you listen to the news?"
        b.   Warkii   waad   dhegeysatay.
             war+kii   waa+aad   dhegeysatay
             news+the   DECL+you listen.to-2sg-PAST
             "You listened to the news."
        c.   Warkii   dhegeyso!
             news+the   listen to-2sg-IMP
             "Listen to the news!"

As these sentences show, the question word in 8.36a is *ma*, while *waa* in 8.36b marks a declarative; these words are called **classifiers** in Saeed (1993). Greenlandic marks a similar distinction with different verbal inflections for person, and so on (Sadock and Zwicky 1985: 167):

8.37   a.   Igavoq
              cook(INDIC 3SG)
              "He cooks."
        b.   Igava
              cook(Q 3SG)
              "Does he cook?"

The problem however is that such marking by special words or inflections can be used for a variety of semantic distinctions. We can use some examples from Somali to show the difficulties, beginning with the lists in table 8.1, where the verb *keen* "bring" is used to show the forms.

   As these tables show, the marking here is quite complicated: the system uses gaps as a marker in several places and tone is important: distinguishing the positive question word *ma* from the negative word *má*, and the optative word *há* from the negative imperative marker *ha*. Note too that the distinctions combine specific classifiers and verbal inflection.

   For our current purposes, the question raised by both sections of table 8.1 is: does every classifier and negative morpheme in table 8.1 mark a distinct sentence type? The answer we would like to give is: only when it regularly and conventionally matches a corresponding speech act. Unfortunately however we do not have a pre-existing list of speech acts to help us decide this. The situation, though not clear-cut, is not totally gloomy however. Sadock and Zwicky (1985) for example suggest some rules of thumb for identifying sentence types, which we can modify slightly as follows:

Table 8.1   Possible Somali markers of sentence type

a.   **Positive forms**

Sentence type	Classifier	Verb	Meaning
	Forms		
	Classifier	*Verb*	*Meaning*
Declarative	*waa*	*keenaa*	"He brings it"
Interrogative	*ma*	*keenaa*	"Does he bring it?"
Imperative	–	*kèen*	"Bring (sg) it!"
Optative	*há*	*keeno*	"May he bring it!"
Potential	*shòw*	*keenee*	"Possibly he'll bring it, He may bring it"

b.   **Negative forms**

Sentence type	Classifier	Negative word	Verb	Meaning
	Forms			
	Classifier	*Negative word*	*Verb*	*Meaning*
Declarative	–	*má*	*keenó*	"He doesn't bring it"
Interrogative	*sòw*	*má*	*keenó*	"Doesn't he bring it?"
Imperative	*ha*	–	*kéenin*	"Do not bring (sg) it!"
Optative	*yaan-u**	–	*kéenin*	"May he not bring it!"

*u = "he"
Source: Saeed (1993: 80–81)[15]

8.38   a.   The sentence types should form a system, so that there should be corresponding versions of a sentence in each type;

b.   similarly, the types should be mutually exclusive, i.e. there should be no combinations of two sentence type markers in the same sentence;

c.   as we have noted, there should be a conventional association with a speech act.

On the basis of rules like these, we can probably discount the **negative** morpheme *má* in table 8.1 as a marker of sentence type in Somali. Negation co-occurs with declarative and interrogative sentences, thus breaking rule 8.38b. This fact also indicates that this marker does not conventionally convey a speech act of denial in Somali, since it is used in, for example, negative questions, thus breaking rule 8.38c. The decisions are more difficult with the **optative** and **potential** markers in table 8.1. These occur in a regular correspondence with interrogative and other sentences but do not co-occur with them: no sentences are optative and interrogative, potential and declarative, and so on. Thus they seem to pass rules 8.38a and b. When it comes to 8.38c, the optative does seem a likely candidate for a sentence type because it is conventionally associated with **wishes** (like *Soomaaliya há noolaato!* "May Somalia live! Long live Somalia!"), which we know from other languages is a likely speech act. So we can add optative to interrogative, declarative and imperative as sentence types for Somali. However, the potential is a little more problematic: the type seems to pass our rules 8.38a and b since it doesn't co-occur with other markers; but note that there is no negative potential form. It is also difficult to view expressions of possibility as a distinct speech act rather than as a type of statement, differing from *waa* statements in showing a different part of the semantic range of modality.

Luckily, solving this descriptive problem is not necessary for our point here and we can leave the issue to one side. What this brief excursion into Somali sentence type marking shows us is that it is not necessarily an easy process to set up the sentence type half of the match-up between sentence type and speech act we identified in section 8.1. It also seems to indicate that markers of sentence type might have functions in other semantic systems.

8.6   Summary

In this chapter we have seen that the social function of an utterance is an important part of its meaning. We reviewed J. L. Austin's very influential theory of **speech acts**, which emphasizes the role of language in communicating social acts like requesting, questioning, promising, thanking, stating, as well as more institutional verbal acts like pronouncing sentence in court, or performing ceremonies of baptizing, marrying, and so on.

We saw that understanding the speech act force, or **illocutionary force** in Austin's terms, of an utterance involves the hearer in combining linguistic knowledge about grammatical marking with both background cultural knowledge and knowledge of the immediate local context. The determination of the linguistic marking of speech act force is in itself not a simple task: we saw that the markers may have other roles to perform in the grammar. Moreover, even when we can identify sentence types, the correlation between these and speech acts is not a steady one: the

investigation of indirect speech acts reveals that inference and conversational principles play a role in hearers' recognition of a speech act. Overall the study of speech acts is a fascinating area: partly because their role is so crucial to the social interaction in a speech community (so that we have no choice but to study them) but also because they give us another glimpse of the interpretive powers that interactants routinely employ in order to communicate: unconsciously and seamlessly combining linguistic and other forms of knowledge in order to reach meaning. Speech act theory has been very influential in a wide range of disciplines from computer science (e.g. Georgila et al. 2009, Kibble 2013) to literary studies (e.g. Miller 2005) and theology (e.g. Adams 2006).

EXERCISES

8.1   In section 8.2.1 we used the ability to insert *hereby* appropriately as a test for a performative utterance. For each of the sentences below, use this as a test to decide which of the following sentences, when uttered, would count as a performative utterance, in Austin's terms:

    a.   I acknowledge you as my legal heir.
    b.   I give notice that I will stand down as chairman.
    c.   I'm warning you that it won't end here.
    d.   I think you're taking this press attention too seriously.
    e.   I deny all knowledge of this scandal.
    f.   I promised them there'd be no fuss.

8.2   Replace the following explicit performatives with corresponding implicit versions, e.g. *I predict that it will rain before teatime → It'll rain before teatime, mark my words*.

    a.   I insist that you come with us.
    b.   We order you to return to your unit.
    c.   I confess that I stole the money.
    d.   We invite you to join us for the weekend.
    e.   We request that you leave.

8.3   Given one example utterance for each of the illocutionary acts below:

    a.   promising
    b.   warning
    c.   requesting
    d.   apologizing
    e.   congratulating

8.4   In section 8.2.5 we noted Austin's distinction between the illocutionary act, the speech act intended by the speaker, and the perlocutionary act,

the take-up by or effect upon its audience. For the following utterances try to invent a context and a plausible perlocutionary effect:

    a.   "Our flight is closing in five minutes!"
    b.   "What are you doing in here at this time?"
    c.   "Please turn off your mobile phone!"
    d.   "It's time for bed."
    e.   "Have you packed your malaria tablets?"

8.5   In the chapter we discussed Searle-type felicity conditions for the speech acts of **promising**, **questioning**, and **requesting**. Write similar conditions for the speech acts below, distinguishing for each between preparatory, propositional, sincerity and essential conditions:

    a.   Warning
    b.   Advising

8.6   Simple imperative sentences in English occur with the verb in the second person and with a morphologically bare form, as in *Leave the room!* The canonical direct speech act is an order. Using your own examples, give three or four other speech acts that an imperative can communicate in the right context. You might find it helpful to briefly describe the context allowing the speech act.

8.7   Interrogative sentences communicate the canonical direct speech act of questioning, as in *What is your name?* Again using your own examples give three or four other speech acts that an interrogative can communicate in the right context. Again it might be helpful to give some detail of the context allowing the speech act.

8.8   Below are some examples of statements that in context might communicate **indirect speech acts**. For each one try to identify a plausible indirect act:

    a.   [Customer telephoning a restaurant]
         I'd like to book a table for tomorrow night.
    b.   [Military officer to subordinate]
         You will hold this position until reinforcements arrive.
    c.   [Customer to barman]
         I'll have the usual.
    d.   [Mother to child coming in from school]
         I bet you're hungry.
    e.   [Bank manager to applicant for an overdraft]
         We regret that we are unable to accede to your request.
    f.   [Fortune-teller to customer]
         You will meet a tall dark stranger.
    g.   [Doorman at a nightclub to aspiring entrant]
         You must be joking.

8.9   In example 8.26 in the chapter we gave a set of felicity conditions for **requesting**. Based on these, and using your own examples, try to form one indirect request for each of the following strategies:

      a.   by querying the preparatory condition of the direct request;
      b.   by stating the preparatory condition of the direct request;
      c.   by querying the propositional content of the direct request;
      d.   by stating the sincerity condition of the direct request.

8.10   Repeat exercise 8.9 for the speech act of **promising**, whose felicity conditions are given in example 8.20 in the chapter. Discuss which of the strategies in exercise 8.9 work for this speech act.

FURTHER READING

In addition to the primary sources already mentioned, speech act semantics is reviewed in Levinson (1983) and Sadock (2004). König and Siemund (2007) discuss speech acts and their grammatical forms across languages. Vanderveken and Kubo (2002) is an interdisciplinary collection of studies on speech acts. Kissine (2013) discusses the interpretation of speech acts, concentrating on constative, directive, and commissive acts. The papers in Sbisà and Turner (2013) survey recent issues in speech act theory. Ruiz de Zarobe and Ruiz de Zarobe (2012) contains articles exploring the link between speech acts and politeness across a range of languages. Kádár and Haugh (2013) provides an overview of research on politeness in communication. Searle (2007) examines the fundamental role of speech acts in human language and Searle (2010) situates speech acts in his philosophy of human social reality.

NOTES

1   These examples are in the standard Yoruba orthography, which includes the following: Tones: ´ = high tone, no mark = mid tone, ` = low tone. The subscript dot indicates distinct sounds: ọ = [ɔ], ẹ = [ɛ], ṣ = [ʃ]; and p and gb are labiovelar plosives [kp] and [gb].

2   In this approach questions and answers are an example of a more general interactional unit: the **adjacency pair**. This is a pair of utterances, which might consist of question–answer, summons–answer, compliment–acceptance/rejection, etc., which form an important structural unit in this theory's view of conversational interaction. The expectation of a response that is set up by the first part is called **conditioned relevance** by Schegloff (1972). See Levinson (1983: 226–79) and Schiffrin (1994: 232–81) for discussion.

3   See Saville-Troike (1989) for an introduction to the study of the conventions governing types of communication in different societies.

4   Such answers have been called **indirect answers** (Nofsinger 1976), **indirect responses** (Pearce and Conklin 1979), and **transparent questions** (Bowers 1982). These

studies discuss how speakers infer that such answers are equivalent to "yes" and "no," and investigate the different attitudes hearers have to such answers compared to literal answers.

5   Strawson (1964) argues for a category distinction between highly conventionalized acts like ship naming and weddings on the one hand and ordinary communicative acts like questions and requests on the other. In this view the former rely on recognizing social rituals and the latter on the recognition of a speaker's communicative intention, in the Gricean sense discussed in chapter 7.

6   We omit discussion of Austin's original five-fold classification of speech acts into *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behabitives*, and *expositives* (Austin 1975: 148–64) since his proposals, which influence subsequent systems, are proposed in a very tentative way, e.g. "I distinguish five very general classes: but I am far from equally happy about all of them" (1975: 151) and "The last two classes are those which I find most troublesome, and it could well be that they are not clear or are cross-classified, or even that some fresh classification altogether is needed. I am not putting any of this forward as in the very least definitive" (1975: 152).

7   This somewhat inaccurately suggests that all speech acts have propositional content. As is well-known, some speech acts do not, for example *Sorry!* or *Excuse me!* for apologies, *Huh?* for a question, *Hello!* or *Hi!* as greetings, etc.

8   A **yes-no** (or elicitative) question seeks confirmation or denial of a proposition, and thus expects an answer yes or no, as in *Is Bill going to London?* An **elicitative** or WH-question seeks new information to augment what is already known, as in the following example, where the speaker knows that Bill is going but seeks extra information:
     a.   Where is Bill going?
     b.   When is Bill going?
     c.   Why is Bill going?

9   We can take a brief look at one of these as an example: Bach and Harnish (1979: 39–59) establish a general taxonomy very like Searle's in example 8.19, though they use six categories rather than five, and employ slightly different labels: **constatives** (e.g. assertions), **directives** (e.g. questions), **commissives** (e.g. promises), **acknowledgments** (e.g. greetings), and **effectives** (e.g. naming a ship) and **verdictives** (e.g. finding a defendant guilty). For their constative class, for example, which corresponds to Searle's representatives, they identify fifteen sub-types, each characterized by a description of the act performed and exemplified by English verbs. We can provide a few of their examples of constative and directive class:

1 Bach and Harnish's (1979) **constative** speech acts
   [where S = speaker, H = hearer, e = linguistic expression, P = the proposition expressed in the speech act]
   a.   *Assertives* (simple): (affirm, allege, assert, aver, avow, claim, declare, deny (assert … not), indicate, maintain, propound, say, state, submit)
           In uttering e, S asserts that P if S expresses:
        i. the belief that P, and
        ii. the intention that H believe that P.
   b.   *Predictives*: (forecast, predict, prophesy)
           In uttering e, S predicts that P if S expresses:
        i. the belief that it will be the case that P, and
        ii. the intention that H believe that it will be the case that P.
   c.   *Concessives*: (acknowledge, admit, agree, allow, assent, concede, concur, confess, grant, own)
           In uttering e, S concedes that P if S expresses:
        i. the belief that P, contrary to what he would like to believe or contrary to what he previously believed or avowed, and
        ii. the intention that H believe that P.

    2 Bach and Harnish's (1979) **directive** speech acts
[where S = speaker, H = hearer, e = linguistic expression, P = the proposition expressed in the speech act, A = the future action]

    a. *Requestives*: (ask, beg, beseech, implore, insist, invite, petition, plead, pray, request, solicit, summon, supplicate, tell, urge)

       In uttering e, S requests H to A if S expresses:

     i. the desire that H do A, and

     ii. the intention that H do A because (at least partly) of S's desire.

    b. *Questions*: (ask, enquire, interrogate, query, question, quiz)

       In uttering e, S questions H as to whether or not P if S expresses:

     i. the desire that H tell S whether or not P, and

     ii. the intention that H tell S whether or not P because of H's desire.

    c. *Requirements*: (bid, charge, command, demand, dictate, direct, enjoin, instruct, order, prescribe, require)

       In uttering e, S requires H to A if S expresses:

     i. the belief that his utterance, in virtue of his authority over H, constitutes sufficient reason for H to A, and

     ii. the intention that H do A because of S's utterance.

10   Searle (1975: 72) notes that asking whether the sincerity condition holds won't work. So asking *Do I wish you wouldn't do that?* will not work as an indirect form of a request, *Please don't do that.*

11   A position close to this is adopted by Sadock (1974).

12   See Schiffrin (1994: 97–136) for a discussion of Goffman's work and its influence on conversational analysis.

13   See Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) for a discussion of other possible strategies for performing face-threatening acts.

14   Or both: see note 15 below.

15   In Saeed (1993: 79–85) words like *waa*, *ma*, *shòw*, etc. are taken to be part of the mood system. This is because, as our discussion here hints, the two systems of modality and sentence type marking overlap in these forms. For example we can analyze the distinction between positive statements with *waa*, negative statements with *má*, and potential sentences with *shòw* as being part of the system of mood marking, i.e. marking a distinction between (for proposition P): certainty that-P, possibility that-P, and certainty that not-P. As we note here, *waa* also seems to mark the speech act of stating.

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